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THE BOSTON METROPOLITAN PARK SYSTEM

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The original topography of Boston was ill suited for use by a great population. It was that of a peninsula, almost an island, rising abruptly from the harbor in three drumlin-shaped hills. Nearby were islands and peninsulas of similar formation, separated from each other and from the mainland by river and harbor, and by broad stretches of marsh reaching irregularly into the glacial slope from surrounding hills of almost solid rock. The panorama which they made was one of remarkable beauty and diversity, and there were many favorable spots along the rivers and upon the glacial slopes suitable for farming and fishing, which were soon sought out and occupied. Scattered villages grew up about these early settlements, and Boston came to be a city with many suburbs, each quite separate in local interest and government, yet all looking to it as their chief city. In 1880 the aggregate population within a radius of twelve miles was about eighty thousand; it is now almost one million four hundred thousand.

The development of these separate localities, and the many changes of topography required to accommodate a rapidly increasing population, gradually brought the community of interest in many ways, which, in other parts of the world, has usually led to combination into one great city. But Boston and its suburbs have sought union chiefly to provide for the general necessities, such as water, sewerage and parks, and in other respects have retained their local forms of government.

The method adopted has been that of creating, through the agency of the state, metropolitan districts and metropolitan commissions, with the specific authority to provide for these districts trunk lines or main features which could not, or would not be likely to be provided by the separate municipalities. These metropolitan works have in no wise interfered with the local autonomy of the several municipalities; and each has its local water system, fed by

the metropolitan main lines, its local sewerage, which discharges into the metropolitan main lines, and such local parks, wholly within the town or city lines, as were secured either in advance of the metropolitan system, or subsequently to provide for local uses not likely to be provided for by metropolitan parks.

In many cases the local parks alone make a very complete system. For example, Boston has parks aggregating about five hundred acres, the larger part of which are included in Franklin Park, the Fenway, Jamaica way, the Arborway and Arboretum, and Columbia Road and Marine Park, all of which connect and form an encircling parkway through the midst of the southerly half or part of the city. In addition it has many small parks and playgrounds. All are highly developed city parks, and have cost approximately sixteen million dollars. The nearby city of Cambridge has acquired and partly developed its frontage on Charles River for about four miles, and provided a number of playgrounds at an aggregate cost of about two million five hundred thousand dollars. Other cities and towns within the district have provided for themselves similar playgrounds and parks, and the city of Lynn has acquired for mixed park and water purposes over two thousand acres of high, rocky, well-wooded land on its northern borders. Altogether these local parks aggregate about five thousand acres, and have cost about twenty million dollars.

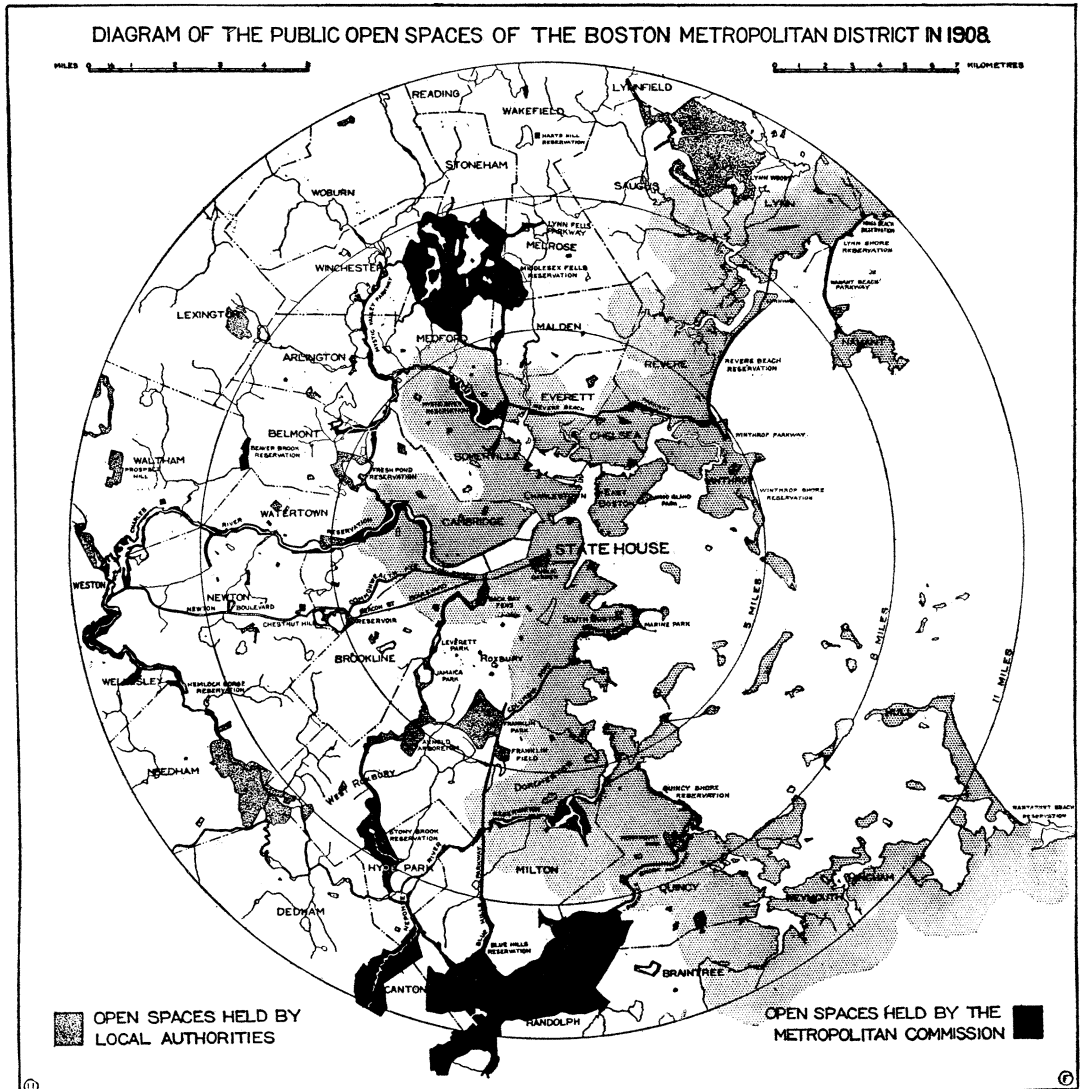
The metropolitan park system resulted from public agitation by men who rightly believed, and with constant earnestness urged, that increasing population was destroying the beauty of scenery and the opportunities for recreation which nature had given so abundantly about Boston. In 1892 a metropolitan park commission of three was appointed to investigate the matter. Their report led to the active work which has resulted in the present metropolitan park system. The initial legislation, chapter 407 of the acts of 1893, authorized an unsalaried commission of five to name its own chairman and have jurisdiction within a metropolitan district made up of Boston and thirty-seven surrounding cities and towns. This jurisdiction was limited only by the statutory definition of its purposes, and by the amount of appropriations. The powers of the board have since been somewhat enlarged and more completely defined by many acts, giving authority to provide and build parkways, bath-

houses and other park structures, and by appropriations which have increased the original appropriation of \$1,000,000 to a present approximate appropriation of \$14,000,000.

As a result of the discretion and powers thus delegated, metropolitan parks or reservations aggregating over 10,000 acres have been secured. Of these about seven thousand five hundred acres include the most notable rock and woodland of the district. Blue Hills Reservation, twelve miles from the state house, contains 4,700 acres of almost unbroken woodland rising into many hilltops, of which Great Blue Hill, at the westerly end, 640 feet above the ocean, is the highest. The reservation is five miles long, and its easterly end is within one-half mile of the harbor. It has but one large pond and but a few acres of open fields. Only a few miles of public highway cross it, but about twenty miles of woods roads have been built within its limits, and three parkways, Neponset River to the westerly end, Blue Hills to the center and Furnace Brook to the easterly end, are planned to give convenient approaches and connection from Stony Brook Woods, Neponset River, Quincy Shore and outside parkways, and some of the more important highways which run through the denser population and gradually converge into the Boston park system. The reservation is easily reached by electric cars.

Middlesex Fells, five miles from the state house, contains 2,200 acres of rocky woodland, while immediately adjoining is a metropolitan water reservation of 1,000 acres, which together make in effect one reservation of 3,200 acres. It is bordered by five cities and towns with large populations, and is crossed by seven miles of public highway. The scenery and topography are diversified with 600 acres of water in many ponds and streams and numerous hilltops, of which Bear Hill, 350 feet above the ocean, is the highest. Over twenty miles of woods roads have been built since it was acquired, and three parkways give approach to it: Mystic Valley on the west, Fellsway in the center and Lynn Fells at the east.

Mystic Valley Parkway, of such size and amplitude as to be more a reservation than a parkway, runs along the Mystic Lakes and Mystic River, and will connect with Alewife Brook and Fresh Pond Parkways to Charles River, and at Fellsway with Revere Beach Parkway to Revere Beach and the east and north shores;



Lynn Fells Parkway, now connecting only with one of the main highways of the district, is expected ultimately to connect with Lynn Woods and with the north shore at Lynn; Fellsway from the center of the reservation runs to within two miles of the state house, crossing Mystic Valley and Revere Beach Parkways. Electric car lines give approach on the east and west, and a new line of the elevated system from Boston runs in Fellsway to and through the center of the reservation, and to a connection with a line from Stoneham, Lowell and Lawrence. Several railroad stations are within easy walking distance of the reservation.

The metropolitan system also includes many miles of seashore reservation, chiefly sandy beach unsuited for commerce, but of greatest beauty and convenience as recreation grounds. Lynn Shore, with sea wall and driveway, borders Swampscott and Lynn and connects with Nahant beaches, which in turn border both sides of the road to Nahant, all with a total of 12.13 miles of beach and harbor frontage. Revere Beach, three miles long, forming a single crescent of hard beach bordered by a driveway, is the great beach resort of the metropolitan district, being within five miles of the state house, and accessible for a five-cent electric car fare to more than one-half of the metropolitan population. Winthrop Shore, one mile long, more local in its use, although nearer Boston than Revere Beach, is also within a five-cent car fare.

On the southeasterly side of the harbor lie Quincy Shore, one mile long, bordering the city of Quincy and a short distance from the Dorchester end of Boston; and Nantasket Beach, at the extreme southeast of the district, a most beautiful sand beach reached by steamboat from the harbor, which makes in to within 200 feet of it, and by electric cars and by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad from Boston and the southern and eastern parts of the district and state. There are over fifty miles of river bank included in the metropolitan park system, of which over thirty miles are along both sides of Charles River, ten miles along Mystic River, and the rest along Neponset River. Driveways have been built or planned for along these rivers wherever feasible.

The development of the reservations has been made conservatively, although more rapidly than was expected when the work was begun. In the woods reservations the woods roads have been

built to serve as fire guards and as a preliminary means of reaching them. Occasional shelters and sanitary and refectory buildings have been provided. At the beaches, border roads, walks and shelters, and three bathhouses of most modern type and equipment, and sanitary and emergency buildings, all of substantial permanent construction, have been provided.

The parkways of the metropolitan system have been built according to the most modern type with incidental provision for protection of their parkway features by the construction of central grass spaces for electric cars and of flanking roads for traffic. A speedway, with mile, half-mile and quarter-mile course, show ring, and a general driveway, has been provided in Boston, Brighton District, between Charles River and Soldiers Field, the Harvard athletic grounds. Bridges of various types of concrete, reinforced concrete and modern piling have been built incident to parkway construction. All construction work has been of very simple but permanent form, except in the case of the woods roads, where the effort has been to keep the general appearance of quiet country roads. Excellent results attained in all construction is due to the combined efforts of the commission and its engineers, landscape architect and architect working in harmony.

The reservations and parkways are grouped for supervision into six divisions, each with its superintendent and local forces and division headquarters, including generally police station, emergency, sanitary and work accommodations. These divisions report directly to the secretary of the board, who is also executive officer in consultation with the chairman and sub-committees of the commission. A police force of one hundred men, including foot, horse and river patrol and detective inspectors, are assigned by the general office to the division superintendents according to necessity. In winter, when strictly police duties are light, they have outdoor work and indoor military drill and emergency instruction. The general office includes bookkeeping, recording, purchasing, law and claims, and engineering departments under the direction of the commission, its sub-committees and the secretary. The commission has its sub-committee for each branch of the service and for each division, with the chairman a member of each, and all report to and consult with the entire board at its regular meetings as occasion may require.

Of the total expenditures thus far made about one-half, that is \$7,000,000, has been for land, and one-half for development and construction. The annual cost of maintenance is about five hundred thousand dollars. All these figures are likely to vary from year to year as development increases and new reservations and parkways are added. They will be materially increased next year by transfer to the board of the new Charles River dam, embankment and basin between Boston and Cambridge, built by a special commission. The appropriations are made in the first instance by the state. The annual appropriations for maintenance are included in the state tax for the year, and other appropriations are gradually repaid in annual payments also included in the state tax. The amount of the annual payment to be made by each city and town is determined by a table of percentages prepared once in five years by the superior court upon report of a special commission appointed by it for that purpose.